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# Israel's Troops Are Leaving, but The 'Lebanon Problem' Persists

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OSS1 Sarid, a member of the Israeli Parliament and a vociferous critic of the war in Lebanon, tells of watching an Israeli troop convoy go by on a road in south Lebanon while on a recent tour of voluntary reserve duty there. Suddenly one of the trucks screeched to a halt and the driver stalked over to Mr. Sarid.

"You're holding up the whole convoy," Mr. Sarid told him.

"Listen Sarid," the driver answered. "I disliked you very much. I admit that. But now, when I see you here, I want to tell you something..." And he proceeded to kiss Mr. Sarid on both cheeks.

Reflecting on that encounter, Mr. Sarid wrote how pleasant it was to smell again "the intoxicating sweetness of national unity." No one here, including Mr. Sarid, has any illusions that an era of national unity has blossomed in Israel, but his encounter with the truck driver was indicative of a new consensus that appears to be taking shape regarding Lebanon. As the Israeli army completes its withdrawal and Israel returns to its preinvasion strategy of noninvolvement in Lebanese domestic politics, focusing entirely on the security of the northern border, the divisions in Israel over Lebanon appear to be easing.

The only issue that remains — one that is now being hotly debated in security circles — concerns how much force the army should use in protecting the northern border from guerrilla attacks. But although Israel would like to return to its old strategy of dealing with Lebanon as a simple security problem for the north, Lebanon has undergone so many changes as a result of the Israeli invasion that this limited approach may no longer be workable.

Key Likud ministers who voted against the original withdrawal plan are now backing Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin's efforts to accelerate the withdrawal and get the Israeli army out by the end of May — once a new security fence has been built along the northern border, the heavy equipment moved out and a local pro-Israeli militia assembled among the villagers living immediately north of the international frontier.

While the immediate debate over Lebanon policy seems to be subsiding, the historical debate over "Who lost Lebanon?" is just beginning. Former Defense Minister Ariel Sharon went onto the offensive last week in an address before a group of lawyers in Haifa. He declared that Israel would have been able to withdraw from Lebanon earlier and under better conditions if he had not been stopped by antiwar critics from "achieving our war aims." The next day Ori Orr, the commander of the northern front, told some residents of northern Israel that the army never should have gone into Lebanon to drive out the Syrians or change the Lebanese Government. Former Foreign Minister Abba Eban declared that Mr. Sharon should desist from commenting on Lebanon because his



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Israeli soldiers on patrol in southern Lebanon.

advice on that subject was akin to a man with seven traffic accidents opening a driving school. Rounding out the week, Mr. Rabin warned that Lebanon was still full of "terrorists" and that Palestinian guerrillas might soon become active again in the south.

The army announced that in the last five weeks, it had killed 70 "terrorists" in south Lebanon. More died yesterday in Israeli raids on four Shiite villages while two days of fighting around Sidon by Christian militiamen against Palestinians and Shiites resulted in at least 32 deaths.

## All Sharon's Fault?

There has been a tendency here to blame Mr. Sharon for everything that went wrong in Lebanon, and having done so, to assume that the problems with the war have been defined and isolated. To be sure, Mr. Sharon's responsibility in the Lebanon invasion was decisive, but the thinking and illusions behind Israel's mistakes — whether they concerned the Palestinians, the Shiites, or the integrity of the Christian Phalangists — were held by the Likud and Labor parties alike.

What is disturbing to some Israeli political analysts is the fact that even today many of those misperceptions continue. For instance,

there is the often-repeated view that "We are pulling out of Lebanon and are ready to return to the status quo before the war so why are the Lebanese still shooting at us? Why are they such fanatics?" From many Lebanese comes the retort: "You came in here with the biggest army in the Middle East, destroyed the fragile status quo that existed among Lebanese communities, totally disrupted the economy of the south for three years, helped to radicalize the Shiites and now you think we can just go back to the situation before the war? It's a new world."

Before, Israel faced the Palestine Liberation Organization in south Lebanon, an enemy without roots in the land, whose opposition to Israel was political and whose organization was unified enough that Israel could engage in a stable year-long ceasefire with it before the invasion. Israel now faces a myriad of small Shiite, Communist and Palestinian groups, many of whom are opposed to Israel on religious grounds, and none of whom have any kind of "return address," uniforms or coherent structure that can be smashed. They are completely intertwined with the populations of the villages and hence virtually impossible to ferret out without occasionally killing civilians — a situation highlighted by the killing of two CBS cameramen by an Israeli tank, which the network conceded last week had not been a deliberate attack.

Israeli newspapers and all Government communiqués refer to the anti-Israeli Shiite resistance groups in south Lebanon as "terrorists" — the same term applied to the Palestinian fighters. The use of the word "terrorist" to describe the Lebanese resistance tends to belittle the rationale of the Shiite opposition to the Israeli occupation in south Lebanon, reducing it to a problem of "terrorism," as if it comes from nowhere like a bad storm and is somehow "irrational."

Last week Ze'ev Schiff, the widely respected military editor of the Haaretz newspaper, wrote blisteringly of Israeli leaders who now complain that army intelligence never forewarned them about the Shiites.

"With our own hands we set in motion the negative dynamic" among the Lebanese Shiites, Mr. Schiff said. "It was the political echelon which caused this with the protracted and unnecessary occupation, yet they still claim that they were not warned. We can liken this to a person who falls asleep in his car on a busy highway and then complains that another car hit him. The madness wasn't Shiite, it was Israeli. We forecast the Shiite reaction pretty well, but not the behavior of the Israeli leadership. Perhaps Israeli intelligence will have to create a special branch to warn the nation about the irresponsible behavior of its leaders."